

excerpts from the book *Anatomy of Fascism* by Robert O. Paxton thirdworldtraveler.com

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The word fascism has its root in the Italian fascio, literally a bundle or sheaf. More remotely, the word recalled the Latin fasces, an axe encased in a bundle of rods that was carried before the magistrates in Roman public processions to signify the authority and unity of the state. Before 1914, the symbolism of the Roman fasces was usually appropriated by the Left. Marianne, symbol of the French Republic, was often portrayed in the nineteenth century carrying the fasces to represent the force of Republican solidarity against her aristocratic and clerical enemies. Fasces are prominently displayed on Christopher Wren's Sheldonian Theater (1664-69) at Oxford University. They appeared on the Lincoln Memorial in Washington (1922) and on the United States quarter minted in 1932.

Italian revolutionaries used the term fascio in the late nineteenth century to evoke the solidarity of committed militants. The peasants who rose against their landlords in Sicily in 1893-94 called themselves the Fasci Siciliani. When in late 1914 a group of left-wing nationalists, soon joined by the socialist outcast Benito Mussolini, sought to bring Italy into World War I on the Allied side, they chose a name designed to communicate both the fervor and the solidarity of their campaign: the Fascio Rivoluzionario d'Azione Interventista (Revolutionary League for Interventionist Action).⁸ At the end of World War I, Mussolini coined the term fascismo to describe the mood of the little band of nationalist ex-soldiers and pro-war syndicalist revolutionaries that he was gathering around himself. Even then, he had no monopoly on the word fascio, which remained in general use for activist groups of various political hues.

Officially, Fascism was born in Milan on Sunday, March 23, 1919.

That morning, somewhat more than a hundred persons,' including war veterans, syndicalists who had supported the war, and Futurist intellectuals, plus some reporters and the merely curious, gathered in the meeting room of the Milan Industrial and Commercial Alliance, overlooking the Piazza San Sepolcro, to "declare war against socialism ... because it has opposed nationalism." Now Mussolini called his movement the Fasci di Combattimento, which means, very approximately, "fraternities of combat."

The Fascist program, issued two months later, was a curious mixture of veterans' patriotism and radical social experiment, a kind of "national socialism." On the national side, it called for fulfilling Italian expansionist aims in the Balkans and around the Mediterranean that had just been frustrated a few months before at the Paris Peace Conference. On the radical side, it proposed women's suffrage and the vote at eighteen, abolition of the upper house, convocation of a constituent assembly to draft a new constitution for Italy (presumably without the monarchy), the eight hour workday, worker participation in "the technical management of industry," the "partial expropriation of all kinds of wealth" by a heavy and progressive tax on capital, the seizure of certain Church properties, and the confiscation of 85 percent of war profits.

Mussolini's movement was not limited to nationalism and assaults on property. It boiled with the readiness for violent action, anti-intellectualism, rejection of compromise, and contempt for established society that marked the three groups who made up the bulk of his first followers demobilized war veterans, pro-war syndicalists, and Futurist intellectuals.

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... novelist Thomas Mann noted in his diary on March 27, 1933, two months after Hitler had become German chancellor, that he witnessed a revolution of a kind never seen before, "without underlying ideas, against ideas, against everything nobler, better, decent, against freedom, truth and justice." The "common scum" had taken power, "accompanied by vast rejoicing on the part of the masses."

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communist orthodoxy in Stalin's USSR

"Fascism is the open, terroristic dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinist and most imperialist elements of finance capital."

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... fascism's two principal coalition partners, liberals and conservatives. In this book I use liberalism in its original meaning, the meaning in use at the time when fascism rose up against it, rather than the current American usage noted above. European liberals of the early twentieth century were clinging to what had been progressive a century earlier, when the dust was still settling from the French Revolution. Unlike conservatives, they accepted the revolution's goals of liberty, equality, and fraternity, but they applied them in ways suitable for an educated middle class. Classical liberals interpreted liberty as individual personal freedom, preferring limited constitutional government and a laissez-faire economy to any kind of state intervention, whether mercantilist, as in the early nineteenth century, or socialist, as later on. Equality they understood as opportunity made accessible to talent by education; they accepted inequality of achievement and hence of power and wealth. Fraternity they considered the normal, condition of free men (and they tended to regard public affairs as men's business), and therefore in no need of artificial reinforcement, since economic interests were naturally harmonious and the truth would out in a free marketplace of ideas. This is the sense in which I use the term liberal in this book, and never in its current American meaning of "far Left." Conservatives wanted order, calm, and the inherited hierarchies of wealth and birth. They shrank both from fascist mass enthusiasm and from the sort of total power fascists grasped for. They wanted obedience and deference, not dangerous popular mobilization, and they wanted to limit the state to the functions of a "night watchman" who would keep order while traditional elites ruled through property, churches, armies, and inherited social influence.

More generally, conservatives in Europe still rejected in 1930 the main tenets of the French Revolution, preferring authority to liberty, hierarchy to equality, and deference to fraternity. Although many of them might find fascists useful, or even essential, in their struggle for survival against dominant liberals and a rising Left, some were keenly aware of the want things to stay as they are, things will have to change."

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The fascisms we have known have come into power with the help of frightened ex-liberals and opportunist technocrats and ex-conservatives ...

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... fascism is more plausibly linked to a set of "mobilizing passions" that shape fascist action than to a consistent and fully articulated philosophy. At bottom is a passionate nationalism. Allied to it is a conspiratorial and Manichean view of history as a battle between the good and evil camps, between the pure and the corrupt, in which one's own community or nation has been the victim. In this Darwinian narrative, the chosen people have been weakened by political

parties, social classes, inassimilable minorities, spoiled rentiers, and rationalist thinkers who lack the necessary sense of community. These "mobilizing passions," mostly taken for granted and not always overtly argued as intellectual propositions, form the emotional lava that set fascism's foundations:

- * a sense of overwhelming crisis beyond the reach of any traditional solutions;
- * the primacy of the group, toward which one has duties superior to every right, whether individual or universal, and the subordination of the individual to it;
- * the belief that one's group is a victim, a sentiment that justifies any action, without legal or moral limits, against its enemies, both internal and external; 60
- * dread of the group's decline under the corrosive effects of individualistic liberalism, class conflict, and alien influences;
- * the need for closer integration of a purer community, by consent if possible, or by exclusionary violence if necessary;
- * the need for authority by natural leaders (always male), culminating in a national chief who alone is capable of incarnating the group's destiny;
- * the superiority of the leader's instincts over abstract and universal reason;
- * the beauty of violence and the efficacy of will, when they are devoted to the group's success;
- * the right of the chosen people to dominate others without restraint from any kind of human or divine law, right being decided by the sole criterion of the group's prowess within a Darwinian struggle.

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What Fascists Offered the Establishment

In a situation of constitutional deadlock and rising revolutionary menace, a successful fascist movement offers precious resources to a faltering elite.

Fascists could offer a mass following sufficiently numerous to permit conservatives to form parliamentary majorities capable of vigorous decisions, without having to call upon unacceptable Leftist partners. Mussolini's thirty-five deputies were not a major weight in the balance, but Hitler's potential contribution was decisive. He could offer the largest party in Germany to conservatives who had never acquired a knack for the mass politics suddenly introduced into their country by the constitution of 1919. During the 1920s, the only non-Marxist party that had successfully built a mass base in Germany was the Zentrum (Center Party), a Catholic party that enjoyed, through its roots in parish life, an actively engaged membership and multiclass recruitment. The Zentrum reached broadly into the working class through the Catholic trade unions, but, as a confessional party, it could not recruit as broadly as Hitler. Holding in his hands the largest party, Hitler permitted conservative coalition makers to escape from reliance on the president's emergency powers that had already endured nearly three years, and form a parliamentary majority that excluded the Left.

The fascists offered more than mere numbers. They offered fresh young faces to a public

weary of an aging establishment that had made a mess of things. The two youngest parties in Italy and Germany were the communists and the fascists. Both nations longed for new leaders, and the fascists offered conservatives a fountain of youth. The fascists also offered another way of belonging-deeper commitment and discipline in an era when conservatives feared dissolution of the social bond.

Fascists had also found a magic formula for weaning workers away from Marxism. Long after Marx asserted that the working class had no homeland, conservatives had been unable to find any way to refute him. None of their nineteenth-century nostrums - deference, religion, schooling-had worked. On the eve of World War I, the Action Française had enjoyed some success recruiting a few industrial workers to nationalism, and the unexpectedly wide acceptance by workers of their patriotic duty to fight for their homelands when World War I began foretold that in the twentieth century Nation was going to be stronger than Class.

Fascists everywhere have built on that revelation. I mentioned the French Cercle Proudhon earlier among the precursors. As for the Nazi Party, its very name proclaimed that it was a workers' party, an Arbeiterpartei. Mussolini expected to recruit his old socialist colleagues. Their results were not overwhelmingly successful. Every analysis of the social composition of the early fascist parties agrees: although some workers were attracted, their share of party membership was always well below their share in the general population. Perhaps those few fascist workers were enough. If the fascist parties could recruit some workers, then fascist violence would take care of the holdouts. This formula of divide and conquer was far more effective than anything the conservatives could provide on their own.

Another seductive fascist offer was a way to overcome the climate of disorder that the fascists themselves had helped cause. Having unleashed their militants in order to make democracy unworkable and discredit the constitutional state, the Nazi and Fascist leaders then posed as the only nonsocialist force that could restore order. It was not the last time that the leaders capitalized on that ambiguity: "Being in the center of the movement," Hannah Arendt wrote in one of her penetrating observations, "the leader can act as though he were above it." Fascist terms for a deal were not insuperably high. Some German conservatives were uneasy about the ant' capitalist rhetoric still flaunted by some Nazi intellectuals, as were Italian conservatives by Fascist labor activists like Edmondo Rossoni. But Mussolini had long come around to "productivism" and admiration for the industrial hero, while Hitler made it clear in his famous speech to the Düsseldorf Industrialists' Club on January 26, 1932, as well as in private conversations, that he was a social Darwinist in the economic sphere, too.

Even if one had to admit these uncouth outsiders to high office in order to make a bargain, conservatives were convinced that they would still control the state. It was unheard-of for such upstarts to run European governments. It was still normal in Europe, even after World War I, even in democracies, for ministers and heads of state to be educated members of the upper classes with long experience in diplomacy or administration. The first lower-class prime minister in Britain was Ramsay MacDonald, in 1924, and he soon came to look, speak, and act like a patrician, to the disgust of Labour militants, who ridiculed him as "Gentleman Mac." President Friedrich Ebert of Germany (1919-25), a saddlemaker by trade, had acquired standing in a long career as Socialist Party functionary and deputy. Hitler and Mussolini were the first lower-class adventurers to reach power in major European countries. Even to this day the French Republic has had no head of state and only a handful of prime ministers who were social outsiders of the ilk of, say, Harry Truman. But circumstances were far from normal in Italy in 1922 and in Germany in 1933. A central ingredient in the conservatives' calculation was that

the Austrian corporal and the greenhorn Italian ex-socialist rabble-rouser would not have the faintest idea what to do with high office. They would be incapable of governing without the cultivated and experienced conservative leaders' savoir faire.

In sum, fascists offered a new recipe for governing with popular support but without any sharing of power with the Left, and without any threat to conservative social and economic privileges and political dominance. The conservatives, for their part, held the keys to the doors of

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Did a majority of the population support fascist regimes consensually, even with enthusiasm, or were they bent to submission by force and terror? The terror model has prevailed, partly because it serves as an alibi for the peoples concerned. But recent scholarship has tended to show that terror was selective and that consensus was high in both Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy.

Neither regime was conceivable without terror. Nazi violence was omnipresent and highly visible after 1933. The concentration camps were not hidden, and executions of dissidents were meant to be known. The publicity of Nazi violence does not mean that support for the regime was coerced, however. Since the violence was directed at Jews, Marxists, and "asocial" outsiders (homosexuals, Gypsies, pacifists, the congenitally insane or crippled, and habitual criminals-groups that many Germans were often happy to see the last of), Germans often felt more gratified than threatened by it. The rest soon learned to keep silent. Only at the end, as the Allies and the Russians closed in, when the authorities attacked anyone accused of giving in, did the Nazi regime turn its violence upon ordinary Germans.

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Fascists were past masters at manipulating group dynamics: the youth group, the leisure-time association, party rallies. Peer pressure was particularly powerful in small groups. There the patriotic majority shamed or intimidated nonconformists into at least keeping their mouths shut. Sebastian Haffner recalled how his group of apprentice magistrates was sent in summer 1933 on a retreat, where these highly educated young men, mostly non-Nazis, were bonded into a group by marching, singing, uniforms, and drill. To resist seemed pointless, tam to lead nowhere but to prison and an end to the dreamed-of career. Finally, with astonishment, he observed himself raising his arm, fitted with a swastika armband, in the Nazi salute.

These various techniques of social control were successful. Mussolini was broadly supported from 1929 at least up through his victory in Ethiopia in 1936. Accommodation with the Catholic Church was central to this support. The Lateran Treaties concluded by Mussolini and Pope Pius XI in February 1929 ended nearly sixty years of conflict between the Italian state and the Vatican with mutual recognition and the payment by Italy of a substantial indemnity for its seizure of papal lands in 1870. Italy recognized Roman Catholicism as "the religion of most Italians." The once anticlerical Mussolini, who had written a youthful novel called *The Cardinal's Mistress* and, at twenty-one, in a debate with a Swiss pastor, had given God-if He existed-five minutes to strike him dead, had submitted in 1925 to a belated church marriage to his longtime common-law companion Rachele Guidi and to the baptism of their children. In elections on March , the Church's explicit support helped produce a vote of 98 percent in favor of the Fascist list of candidates (there were no others) for parliament. Fascism paid a high price in the long

term for the Church's aid to consensus: as the hare of Fascist dynamism wore itself out, the tortoise of Catholic parish life and culture plodded along to become the basis of Christian democratic rule in Italy after 1945.

The other ingredient of Mussolini's popularity in the middle years was his victory over Ethiopia in summer 1936, the last-it turned out-of his military successes. Popular approval of the Italian Fascist regime declined only when Mussolini's expansionist foreign policy began to produce defeats. The Duce's need to demonstrate a "special relation with history" required him to mount a dynamic foreign policy. Beginning with the defeat of his "volunteer" armored force by Spanish Republicans and international volunteers at Guadalajara, in the hills northeast of Madrid, in March 1937, however, foreign policy provided more humiliation than reinforcement for Mussolini's regime.

The Nazi regime, too, aroused considerable popular enthusiasm within Germany by the mid-1930s. Full employment plus a long string of bloodless foreign policy victories raised approval far above the Nazis' initial 44 percent in the March 1933 elections. Although Germans grumbled a lot about restrictions and shortages, and although the outbreak of war in September 1939 was received glumly, the Hitler cult was exempt from the criticism reserved for party officials and bureaucrats.

Fascist regimes were particularly successful with young people. Fascist arrival in power sent a shock wave down through society to each neighborhood and village. Young Italians and Germans had to face the destruction of their social organizations (if they came from socialist or communist families) as well as the attraction of new forms of sociability. The temptation to conform, to belong, and to achieve rank in the new fascist youth and leisure organizations (which I will discuss more fully below) was very powerful. Especially when fascism was still new, joining in its marching and uniformed squads was a way to declare one's independence from smothering bourgeois homes and boring parents. Some young Germans and Italians of otherwise modest attainments found satisfaction in pushing other people around.

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Even if public enthusiasm was never as total as fascists promised their conservative allies, most citizens of fascist regimes accepted things as they were. The most interesting cases are people who never joined the party, and who even objected to certain aspects of the regime, but who accommodated because its accomplishments overlapped with some of the things they wanted, while the alternatives all seemed worse.

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Fascism was not the first choice of most businessmen, but most of them preferred it to the alternatives that seemed likely in the special conditions of 1922 and 1933-socialism or a dysfunctional market system. So they mostly acquiesced in the formation of a fascist regime and accommodated to its requirements of removing Jews from management and accepting onerous economic controls. In time, most German and Italian businessmen adapted well to working with fascist regimes, at least those gratified by the fruits of rearmament and labor discipline and the considerable role given to them in economic management. Mussolini's famous corporatist economic organization, in particular, was run in practice by leading businessmen.

Peter Hayes puts it succinctly: the Nazi regime and business had "converging but not identical interests." Areas of agreement included disciplining workers, lucrative armaments contracts, and job-creation stimuli.

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Fascists had to do something about the welfare state. In Germany, the welfare experiments of the Weimar Republic had proved too expensive after the Depression struck in 1929. The Nazis trimmed them and perverted them by racial forms of exclusion. But neither fascist regime tried to dismantle the welfare state (as mere reactionaries might have done).

Fascism was revolutionary in its radically new conceptions of citizenship, of the way individuals participated in the life of the community. It was counterrevolutionary, however, with respect to such traditional projects of the Left as individual liberties, human rights, due process, and international peace.

In sum, the fascist exercise of power involved a coalition composed of the same elements in Mussolini's Italy as in Nazi Germany. It was the relative weight among leader, party, and traditional institutions that distinguished one case from the other. In Italy, the traditional state wound up with supremacy over the party, largely because Mussolini feared his own most militant followers, the local ras and their squadristi. In Nazi Germany, the party came to dominate the state and civil society, especially after war began.

Fascist regimes functioned like an epoxy: an amalgam of two very different agents, fascist dynamism and conservative order, bonded by shared enmity toward liberalism and the Left, and a shared willingness to stop at nothing to destroy their common enemies.

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The United States itself has never been exempt from fascism. Indeed, antidemocratic and xenophobic movements have flourished in America since the Native American party of 1845 and the Know-Nothing Party of the 1850s. In the crisis-ridden 1930s, as in other democracies, derivative fascist movements were conspicuous in the United States: the Protestant evangelist Gerald B. Winrod's openly pro-Hitler Defenders of the Christian Faith with their Black Legion; William Dudley Pelley's Silver Shirts (the initials "SS" were intentional); the veteran-based Khaki Shirts (whose leader, one Art J. Smith, vanished after a heckler was killed at one of his rallies); and a host of others. Movements with an exotic foreign look won few followers, however. George Lincoln Rockwell, flamboyant head of the American Nazi Party from 1959 until his assassination by a disgruntled follower in 1967,⁸³ seemed even more "un-American" after the great anti-Nazi war.

Much more dangerous are movements that employ authentically American themes in ways that resemble fascism functionally. The Klan revived in the 1920s, took on virulent anti-Semitism, and spread to cities and the Middle West. In the 1930s, Father Charles E. Coughlin gathered a radio audience estimated at forty million around an anticommunist, anti-Wall Street, pro-soft money, and-after 1938-anti-Semitic message broadcast from his church in the outskirts of Detroit. For a moment in early 1936 it looked as if his Union Party and its presidential candidate, North Dakota congressman William Lemke, might overwhelm Roosevelt. The plutocrat-baiting governor Huey Long of Louisiana had authentic political momentum until his assassination in 1935, but, though frequently labeled fascist at the time, he was more accurately a share-the-wealth demagogue. The fundamentalist preacher Gerald L. K. Smith, who had worked with both Coughlin and Long, turned the message more directly after World War II to the "Judeo-Communist conspiracy" and had a real impact. Today a "politics of resentment" rooted in authentic American piety and nativism sometimes leads to violence against some of the very same "internal enemies" once targeted by the Nazis, such as homosexuals and defenders of abortion rights.

Of course the United States would have to suffer catastrophic setbacks and polarization for these fringe groups to find powerful allies and enter the mainstream. I half expected to see emerge after 1968 a movement of national reunification, regeneration, and purification directed against hirsute antiwar protesters, black radicals, and "degenerate" artists. I thought that some of the Vietnam veterans might form analogs to the Freikorps of 1919 Germany or the Italian Arditi, and attack the youths whose demonstrations on the steps of the Pentagon had "stabbed them in the back." Fortunately I was wrong (so far). Since September 11, 2001, however, civil liberties have been curtailed to popular acclaim in a patriotic war upon terrorists.

The language and symbols of an authentic American fascism would, of course, have little to do with the original European models. They would have to be as familiar and reassuring to loyal Americans as the language and symbols of the original fascisms were familiar and reassuring to many Italians and Germans, as Orwell suggested. Hitler and Mussolini, after all, had not tried to seem exotic to their fellow citizens. No swastikas in an American fascism, but Stars and Stripes (or Stars and Bars) and Christian crosses. No fascist salute, but mass recitations of the pledge of allegiance. These symbols contain no whiff of fascism in themselves, of course, but an American fascism would transform them into obligatory litmus tests for detecting the internal enemy.

Around such reassuring language and symbols and in the event of some redoubtable setback to national prestige, Americans might support an enterprise of forcible national regeneration, unification, and purification. Its targets would be the First Amendment, separation of Church and State (creches on the lawns, prayers in schools), efforts to place controls on gun ownership, desecrations of the flag, unassimilated minorities, artistic license, dissident and unusual behavior of all sorts that could be labeled antinational or decadent.

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Religion may be as powerful an engine of identity as the nation; indeed, in some cultures, religious identity may be far more powerful than national identity. In integrist religious fundamentalisms, the violent promotion of the unity and dynamism of the faith may function very much like the violent promotion of the unity and dynamism of the nation. Some extreme forms of Orthodox Judaism regard the state of Israel as a blasphemy because it was established before Messiah came. Here religious integrism fully replaces national integrism. Fundamentalist Muslims offer little loyalty to the various secular Islamic states, whether presidential or monarchical. Islam is their nation. For Hindu fundamentalists, their religion is the focus of an intense attachment that the secular and pluralist Indian state does not succeed in offering. In such communities, a religious-based fascism is conceivable. After all, no two fascisms need be alike in their symbols and rhetoric, employing, as they do, the local patriotic repertory.

The principal objection to succumbing to the temptation to call Islamic fundamentalist movements like al-Qaeda and the Taliban fascist is that they are not reactions against a malfunctioning democracy. Arising in traditional hierarchical societies, their unity is, in terms of Emile Durkheim's famous distinction, more organic than mechanical. Above all, they have not "given up free institutions," since they never had any.

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Fascism may be defined as a form of political behavior marked by obsessive preoccupation with community decline, humiliation, or victimhood and by compensatory cults of unity, energy, and purity, in which a mass-based party of committed nationalist militants, working in uneasy

but effective collaboration with traditional elites, abandons democratic liberties and pursues with redemptive violence and without ethical or legal restraints goals of internal cleansing and external expansion.

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fascism's "mobilizing passions":

- * a sense of overwhelming crisis beyond the reach of any traditional solutions;**
- * the primacy of the group, toward which one has duties superior to every right, whether individual or universal, and the subordination of the individual to it;**
- * the belief that one's group is a victim, a sentiment that justifies any action, without legal or moral limits, against its enemies, both internal and external;**
- * dread of the group's decline under the corrosive effects of individualistic liberalism, class conflict, and alien influences;**
- * the need for closer integration of a purer community, by consent if possible, or by exclusionary violence if necessary;**
- * the need for authority by natural chiefs (always male), culminating in a national chieftain who alone is capable of incarnating the group's historical destiny;**
- * the superiority of the leader's instincts over abstract and universal reason;**
- * the beauty of violence and the efficacy of will, when they are devoted to the group's success;**
- * the right of the chosen people to dominate others without restraint from any kind of human or divine law, right being decided by the sole criterion of the group's prowess within a Darwinian struggle.**

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"Giving up free institutions," especially the freedoms of unpopular groups, is recurrently attractive to citizens of Western democracies, including some Americans. We know from tracing its path that fascism does not require a spectacular "march" on some capital to take root; seemingly anodyne decisions to tolerate lawless treatment of national "enemies" is enough.

